



How To Start World War III Without Even Trying



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Chapter 1 by Brandy

It all started with a balloon.

Well, a hot air balloon. It was supposed to be a romantic gesture, but as usual, my luck is not particularly good. My girlfriend dumped me for a ridiculous reason -- and really, who doesn't like ice cream? and why am I the bad guy for pointing that fact out? -- three days before I proposed.

As you may know, hot air balloon rides are non-refundable, so I decided to take the trip with the first person who agreed to go with me. Anyone, even the guy chain smoking by the broken, and frankly obsolete, pay phone, would be a better companion than that heartless ice cream hating harpy I almost chained myself to for life.

The chain smoker introduced himself as Al, as he stubbed out the half smoked cigarette and shook my hand. He wore a leather jacket and had fancy shoes. A big step up from the slob I normally hung out with. He thanked me for the opportunity of a lifetime and accompanied me to the take off zone.

Everything was just peachy until it very suddenly wasn't. And sure, the rose petals scattered on the path up to the balloon caused a little bit of a stir, and the champagne was a little much, and the balloon operator was a bit of a jerk, but Al and I were the happy couple, but I could

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I had a lot more trouble ignoring AI pushing the operator over the edge. He was adamant that it was an accident, but the skill in which he took over the controls and changed course, made it hard to believe this wasn't his plan all along.

AI threatened to blindfold me, but I promised to behave. I obviously didn't, but I can sound sincere when the situation calls for it. When AI adjusted the gas pull thingy, I snuck a peek over the edge.

As terrible as this romantic proposal turned hot air balloon hijacking had been up to that point, I realized things were just beginning.

Chapter 2 by Harlander



We'd drifted a long way. The town we'd launched from was a glittering blotch in the distance. A river slid sluggishly across the fields below, but what really caught my attention was the square of a wire fence, topped with warning lights. It enclosed a large area, and I looked it over, wondering what exactly we were approaching.

Two giant cooling towers, high enough that our basket would brush their tops, belched steam into the air. A car park looked standard enough, and it stood outside a squat building next to... a large concrete dome. I finally realised where we'd come.

Pine Flats Nuclear Power Plant.

AI looked me in the eye and winked, reaching into his jacket. "I think you're going to like this," he said, and pulled something out. It was shiny, chrome finish glinting in the sunlight. A knurled grip, decorative fins, and a bulbous prong at the end like something out of a 50s sci-fi novel. "Is that..." I began, but before I could finish he pointed the prong at the base of one of the cooling towers and squeezed the thing's handle.

A beam of light shot out, and in a roar of collapsing masonry and a massive cloud of steam, the cooling tower crumpled in on itself. Immediately, the sound of sirens began to echo up from the

facility below. "What have you done, AI?"

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